

Will the European Research Council become an integrative mechanism for European research?

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Abstract

Given that in recent years, there have been intensified efforts to promote integration in European research and research policy, the paper poses the question of the extent to which the new European funding body, The European Research Council (ERC), promotes integration in European research funding and policy space. Attention is paid to the mechanisms through which this might happen. The ERC is a new agency and its activities have just started, and therefore, we cannot yet measure the degree to which it indeed has promoted integrative processes – or not. The paper will, however, take the programme principles and programme design as a starting point and will analyse possible ways in which these might lead to integrative processes. In so doing it also outlines ways in which empirical research could tackle these questions. Since there are a lot of concurrent developments in the European research policy and funding scene, attributing effects to the ERC is going to be especially challenging.

This paper will demonstrate that even though integration is not on the agenda of the ERC, the new funding body has potential to provoke processes with integrative (or disintegrative) impacts. Major early impacts in terms of integration are related to the cognitive or symbolic level. Impacts at the social/structural level by contrast take much longer to appear. In terms of integrative effects, much depends on the further institutionalisation of this new agency, its ability to maintain its legitimacy, and the resources entrusted to it to implement its strategy. The ERC has a potential to become an important European funding institution pending on its resources and success.